Cowles, A. B.

UMZUMBE RE-VISITED

By
MRS. AMY B. COWLES

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VIEW OF UMZUMBE

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THE month of January we spent at Umzumbe, the home of my childhood, and my father's station for twenty-seven years. All the sensations of "Home, Sweet Home" and "the old oaken bucket" sweep over me as I start to write about it. Umzumbe is over one hundred miles south of this place. The whole journey we did in one day, going by train to within fifteen miles of the old home. How often and often as children we covered the distance in slow ox-wagons, taking a week to reach Durban. Sleeping in the wagon, eating off tin plates with tin spoons, watching the fourteen oxen inspanned and outspanned, was a huge, prolonged picnic for us, but for poor mother a perfect dread. Her part was to sit up nights and stuff towels in the tent of the wagon to keep out the rain, to get food for us by hook or crook, and to stow four of us away at night. By candle light the ticks were picked off each one, then we were tucked in heels to heels, or heads to heads, with sometimes a native girl curled at our feet. The occasional snores and snorts from this direction were suggestive to the juuenile mind, espe-

cially when outspanned near deep bush. Of course poor mother had to put up with the merest corner for a resting place, and often slept half sitting. Ah, well! the years of ox-wagons are fast rolling away, even in Natal, and the net work of railways increases year by year.

This time we made most of the journey in civilized fashion, by train. For hours we rode along the sea-shore almost on the beach. We took deep sniffs of the salty air, and watched the waves dash over the rocks just below. It was an enchanting ride. The blue sea rolled in a great mound against the sky, the long, white fringe of surf breaking ever on the sandy shore, making a combination of beauty which kept us in constant ecstacy. As we rode over many beautiful lagoons and river-mouths, we could look far up the little streams and feast our eyes on their thickly-wooded banks and the great, rolling hills beyond.

About two P. M. we reached the Umzumbe railway station. Here we found a wagon awaiting us, a sort of connecting link between the past and the present. Our steamer trunk and various parcels were bundled in, then mother and I, Helen, Raymond and Mr. Cowles followed. Sacks of dry banana leaves, brought for the purpose, were put as cushions on top of the trunks, and these were our seats. With a smart driver, fresh oxen and good roads, we made rapid progress for three or four miles. Then, leaving the government road, our troubles began. Up and down over grassy, stony hills we went,

bumpety, bumpety, bump. Six times we alighted, and twice the back wheels were roped, as an extra brake. As we watched the wagon tipping way over to one side, and then to the other, we were quite satisfied to be on foot, even though a strong wind, a drizzling rain, and deep, wet grass did not especially add to our comfort. We had three or four hours of this. How our sympathies went out to the lady teachers who have to make this trip semi-annually!

An hour before reaching home we came into full view of the station. Such a view! How can I describe it! A great amphitheatre of mountains and hills lay before us. Mountain ranges loomed against the sky, a great table mountain here, a sharp-pointed mountain there. Within this great hollow were hills and hills and hills, rolling into each other and out of each other and around each other, just a wild tumble of hills. In the centre of all this beautiful confusion, on a hill in the valley, we could plainly see the large, white building of the Umzumbe Home, a sort of big Noah's Ark, in what used to be a veritable ocean of heathenism. On one side of it, two recitation buildings, beyond it our house, now the teachers' home, then the church and station schoolhouse, "a city set on a hill," whose light has been radiating throughout that dark valley for some thirty years. This the monument of two missionaries and their wives, Mr. and Mrs. Robbins for ten years, and my father and mother for twenty-seven years labored here.

We reached the old home just before dark. Nine years since I saw it last, and then my old father, with his long, white beard, was there. How he did enjoy my babies then, and how glad I am he saw them. Home, sweet home, how beautiful it was! The old house, with its red brick walls and thatched roof, looked small and old, and not nearly so grand as it did when I was a child. I had only Zulu houses to compare it with then! But, O, the hills, the everlasting hills, no change in them, just as grand, just as green and beautiful as ever. The river, too, and the valleys, and the same old trees. "Sweetly wild, sweetly wild were the scenes that charmed me when a child."

We had come in the week of prayer. At four o'clock the next morning after our arrival, we were startled out of our sleep by the ringing of the church bell. O, how our weary bones did ache from the jaunt of the previous day, but that bell soon had us up. As soon as the service was over in the church next door, a crowd of men and women came to greet us. All our old friends from way back were there, and the good pastor, too. Such Mamo's, and Mame's, and Oh's and Au's; such exclamations over mother's youthful looks; such surprise at my gray hairs, and my big children! How we all laughed and chatted and shook hands, and had a general hullabaloo. And this was the beginning of four delightful weeks. For just that little while we lived their joys and sorrows with them. We visited them in their houses,

and received them in ours. Even some of mother's old sinners and backsliders came to see her, at the risk of the sermon they knew was sure to fall. It was delightful once again to attend service in the little, red-brick chapel, to sit once more on the same old, wooden bench and watch the little company of neatly-dressed Christians come into the various services. Several times we were called upon to speak or to lead the meeting, and the responsive looks on the faces of old and young furnished ample inspiration. But I liked best to listen to the flowing, eloquent Zulu of the various leaders. How the Zulus can preach! Silver-tongued orators, every one.

Gifts from our friends were numerous throughout our stay. Pans of sweet potatoes and beans, green corn and eggs, came pouring in, and fifteen fowls besides. How we did feast!

One dear, old soul, the mother of three pairs of twins and five others besides, amused me much by marshalling up first this one, then that one, of her numerous family for our inspection. Love and pride glowed in the dear, old face, and, indeed, I could rejoice with her. Calling at another house one day, I found the whole family just ready to come and see us. Six or eight children, all scrubbed and clean and neatly dressed, sat on a bench on a narrow veranda. The mother stood before them with a stick in hand. The evident solemnity of the children, and the striking resemblance of the occasion to the Ruggleses in "The Birds' Christmas Carol," was to me highly

amusing. Among other funny things, the antics of the monkeys, which swarmed in the forest back of the house, should be mentioned. At almost any hour of the day we could see their little, black faces peeping at us through the trees. Seeing a man around, especially a white man, they would at once become very scarce, but ladies, black or white, had no terror for them, and they would very shortly make a raid on the place, sometimes even into the girls' kitchen. Very cute, but a great pest to the school. A mother monkey and her three children got into such a quarrel one day close by the church, they disturbed the meeting, and some one had to go out and drive them away. The natives declare that this great horde of marauders are the direct descendants of the pets we had when we were children. One fellow, old and very thin, is still seen with a string around his waist! How much we relish the idea of a Bridgman generation of monkeys, I am not quite sure!

The overwhelming heat throughout our four weeks' stay was a never to be forgotten experience. We lived in a Turkish bath day and night. I do not remember to have been dry more than twice, then the thermometer dropped away down to 75, and we felt cold and put on wraps. Eighty and ninety degrees was the usual, and scarcely a change at night. Though so wilting to us all, this steaming heat was elegant for tropical vegetation. The trees hung heavy with foliage. We seemed in a garden of plumes. A night blooming Cereus (cactus)

climbing a tree in the front yard to the height of forty feet, gave us a magnificent display of twenty-five and thirty blossoms at a time, a beautiful sight.

We were sorry not to see the Umzumbe Home in session. It being vacation, both teachers and pupils were away. There is no resident missionary at Umzumbe now. Miss Smith and Miss Frost, with colonial and native help, heroically carry on the great work of this school alone. A European trader and his family close by is all they have for white neighbors the year around. This is now the most isolated of our occupied stations. The two ladies deserve the sympathy of all their friends in their heroic willingness to live alone in such isolation and with such grave responsibilities.

One of the sweetest memories of my visit is our Kindergarten reunion. For two years before I was married I taught a Kindergarten of forty children at Umzumbe. Longing to gather them for a social time, still I dreaded it, not knowing how my children, now grown to young men and women, would behave. A beautiful surprise awaited me. What used to be a horde of little savages came now as ladies and gentlemen, thanks to their subsequent training in Umzumbe Home and Jubilee Hall. Their behavior was perfect. There was a keen sense of fun, but no nonsense. We began with a prayer meeting and a talk together, then followed reminiscences of Kindergarten days. After this, a little tea party out of doors. We stood up side by side, and sang and played

our old Kindergarten games and songs together. Such fun we all had! Going into the house on an errand, I came back to find them all singing hymns. It was heavenly music, out there under the trees, with the sun just sinking to rest behind the hills. When they had finished, I told them that when I heard them singing, it did not seem as though there could be any sin in the world, and how I wished there might not be in their hearts or mine. Just before saying goodbye, with one accord they stood up and chanted, "The Lord bless thee and keep thee, the Lord make His face to shine upon thee," etc. Life was deeply sweet just then. A few days later, a purse of small coins was handed to me, labelled, "From your Kindergarten Children," and expressing the wish that this money might help to print the Kindergarten songs, so that other children might be blessed as they had been. My dear, old mother was delighted when she saw the money, and exclaimed, "O, they are getting civilized; they are getting civilized," and I realized that she had worked forty-five years for such signs as this.

Mother's mind dwelt much in the past those days at Umzumbe. We spoke often of the beginning of things in that lonely valley. Forty-five years ago, two men, "Brother Robbins and Brother Bridgman," were sent off into the wilds to prospect for a new station. Ninety miles from Durban they found this beautiful valley, encircled by that amphitheatre of mountains; as to

scenery, an Eden; as to things spiritual, a desert of deserts. Natives dressed only in skins were painted and feathered as well. They had never seen money, and all trading and hiring of service was paid for in beads. Tigers and hyenas abounded in the bushes. Some bundles of grass leaned against a tree furnished the first sleeping place for the two brethren. Lying down at night, with loaded guns, they could watch the stars overhead, while the hyenas growled around their wigwam. A grass hut first, then a little mud cottage was put up, and to this the wives and babies were brought. After some years, a comfortable brick house was built, mainly by the missionary's own hands. Ox-wagons furnished a connection between them and Durban, their source of supplies. The tiny veranda of the mud cottage was the first schoolhouse. Hither a few children were coaxed to taste and see how sweet is learning. A pinch of salt in each tiny, black palm was the reward for all ordinary achievements, while the glories of a shirt were held out as a prize to the master intellect which should compass the intricacies of the primer! Of the years that followed who shall tell. Hard years of brickmaking and character building, years of preaching the Gospel, and, more important yet, of living it. The thirteenth chapter of first Corinthians had to be preached every hour of the day without words. Heathen thirsting for the water of life were not found here. Instead, proud, satisfied, self-sufficient,

sons of the heavens, as the word Zulu (heaven) implies.

Perhaps the most potent influence which commended the Gospel was the dosing of the sick, and the pulling of teeth. My father became an expert in the latter. Scarcely a day but some one came to have a tooth drawn. Seeing teeth pulled and snakes killed were the principal diversions of my childhood. No need of "Jungle Books" in our home! As soon as a swollen face came into the yard, we children flew to the scene of operation. If a "fraid" patient had come that day, and the screams were specially loud, the more exciting for us, especially if it was a man that cried. My father would first seat his patient down on the gravelly ground, put a sack between his knees to protect his clothes. Taking the greasy head between his knees, in lieu of dentist's chair, he would extract the tooth with more or less trouble. The first question usually asked was, "Is it out? Is it really out?" Then my father would be called "Merciful Deliverer, Nkosi, Nkosi" (chief), and his hands would be covered with grateful kisses. Altogether it was quite a thrilling scene, and for children who never saw fire-engines and railroad smash-ups, a sort of substitute. But this is digression, How long it was from the first seed sowing to the first harvest it would be hard to tell, the change came so gradually, but it was a long, weary stretch of years; then, again, another long period before the little church could stand on its feet alone. When at last a native pastor of their own number was ordained,

and the church became self-supporting, can you imagine the feelings of the old, white-haired couple, who had given their lives to bring this about. This was the crowning event of my father's life. He died soon after.

There are now two hundred members in this church, and in its seven branches among the kraals three hundred children attending school daily; one hundred girls in the Umzumbe Home boarding school; sixteen men, now trained preachers, gathered from this heathen hollow; sixty little cottages of Christian Zulus nestled close about this hill of light. This to show for two lives "thrown away" in the wilds of Africa. "He that loseth his life shall find it."

Perhaps I should stop here, but I am saving the best to the last. It is the glory of this little church that it is self-propagating, truly a missionary church. For years it has been the custom of its members to go out on Sundays into the surrounding kraals and hold services. This, of course, is all voluntary. One man walks fifteen miles and back each Sunday to hold his service way up on the hills. Sometimes he goes alone; sometimes others join to help. In speaking of his congregation one day, he said, "O, yes, Nkosikazi, there is n't one dressed one among them yet, but the hut is packed every Sunday, sometimes fifty or eighty, and they are all in paint and feathers and dirt, but, by the grace of God, they 'll get clean one of these days."

KRAAL SERVICE.

Two women hold a service very often at a chief's kraal, two miles from the station. They asked us to take service one Sunday, so Mr. Cowles and I rode over there on horseback one Sabbath morning. Helen wanted to go, too, so I took her on, astride, back of me. As usual, it was a blistering day. But, as we climbed out of the amphitheatre of hills, a breeze straight from the sea struck us, bringing great relief. When we entered the yard of the kraal, we were greeted by the usual pack of yelping and snarling dogs, lean, lanky creatures, showing us their teeth. It was milking time, so horned beasts as well were walking about the yard, rolling their eyes at us. We dismounted, and Mr. Cowles unsaddled our horses, and tied them to the cattle kraal posts. There were only three huts in this Royal kraal. Out of the low door of the central one the chief soon came to greet us. His Royal Highness was a young fellow of very ordinary countenance, but of magnificent physique; a tall, supple figure, well proportioned, with muscular strength showing in every limb, and with an elastic, stately tread. There was nothing royal in his dress, just a dirty shirt and loin cloth, and some bead and brass ornaments about ankles and arms. He greeted us cordially, and we were soon sitting beside him on a mat on the floor of his hut, eating sweet potatoes. While we sat there, peeling our potatoes with our fingers and eating, the chief told us of his dogs, of his gun, and of his

trouble with the monkeys stealing from his gardens. He finished of his meal by taking deep quaffs of beer from a black clay bowl.

By this time the women and children had gone out, and Mr. Cowles had his opportunity for a straight, serious talk. How our hearts ached for this young ruler. It was just the story of the rich young man over again. The chief himself is almost persuaded to be a Christian. The preaching of the two faithful women, at whose invitation we had come that day, had stirred him deeply. Sometimes he is kept awake at night thinking of that other kingdom of which there is no end ; but his heathen people are clamoring for him to take more wives quickly, to have many sons and daughters, to build many huts, to have many cattle, and so to become great and grand and truly royal. He has but two wives now. The bright face of one I shall not soon forget. When we finally took our leave, she looked up at me so eagerly, saying, "Ah, and shall we never meet again?" And I told her how I wished we might in that home above. It was her cute, little six-months-old son who furnished amusement for us all. Naked, save for a string of beads about his waist, he persisted in creeping up to Mr. Cowles, and then sucking the toe of his shoe. This performance was repeated so often and so persistently, it became highly amusing to the whole hut full, and the mother looked very pleased at the notice taken of her small bit of royalty.

African fashion, we waited several hours for our congregation to gather. Finally, they came stringing along over the hills. Then we had our service. It was to me a beautiful hour. Such opportunities and experiences linger long and lovingly in one's heart. A mat was spread for us on the floor of the newest hut. The chief came in and sat opposite. A few men and a lot of women and children filled in the rest of the floor room. Mr. Cowles gave a long, earnest talk, then I said a few words, and our two Bible women followed with most earnest prayers. It cost no stretch of the imagination to realize the massive wall of heathenism and superstition against which the sword of the Spirit was being thrust that day. The semi-nude bodies, the bead ornaments, the hair of the women done up in red clay and grease, the enormous beer pots at the rear of the huts, etc., etc., all told of the lives still bound by the inherited darkness of centuries. And yet, how they listened! Some eyes were riveted upon us. On this face and that was an eager, hungry look, which seemed to say, "Like our chief, we, too, are almost persuaded, but how, how can we do it, how can we break these great bands which have held us for generations without number?" Our hearts yearned over them, and we realized again how great a thing it is for one such to come out of darkness into light. As we stooped our way out of the hut after the service, one of the dear Bible women said to me, "O, Nkosikazi (lady), when I see these people, I

remember that I, too, was just like them; and when I see what I now am, what hope is now mine, I just long to go and tell them about Jesus." And so she does. Scarcely a Sunday that does not see her and others of the Umzumbe Church finding their way for miles over the hills to this kraal or that, there to tell the good tidings of great joy. Here and there among the kraals for miles around Umzumbe the heathen are now calling for teachers and preachers. How the faces of the native Christians glow, as they tell of urgent invitations to this kraal or that, to come and pray and teach. Several rough looking, mud wall churches may now be found nestled among the surrounding hills, and others will soon be built. Besides services on Sunday, day schools are held in these tiny chapels. Three hundred children now attend school daily in the Umzumbe Valley. These are all under Mr. Cowles' supervision.

I must not neglect to tell you that after service in the chief's kraal, we were invited into the third hut, where a feast of curdled milk was placed before us. First blowing our germ theories to the winds, we proceeded to refresh ourselves with this delicious "Zulu ice-cream," a sort of soft Dutch cheese. Its sharp acid brought great relief from our intense thirst. The chief also brought a nice hen to me. He caught it himself, with his dogs, chasing it round and round. When at last his Royal Highness brought it to me, the perspiration was streaming off his face. It is not often that one is so

royally entertained, and I realized that my father's name had much to do with our cordial welcome.

Well, dear friends, we left Umzumbe as we came, by the same old road of bumps and whacks. but it was a climb up this time, and not quite so bad. At one place we passed right beside the large kraal of a chief. The inmates all came out to stare at us. Among them was an albino, a girl between five and six feet tall. Her body was as white as a European's, and was clothed in a dirty cloth, the size of a small towel. Her hair, like sheep's wool, was as white, her red, sunburnt face, together with her small, squinting, twinkling eyes made a repulsive picture. As we passed, she started a heathen dance, and her white arms and legs flew in outline against the sky. The whole scene was hideous, suggestive of hobgoblins and what not. It was some time before the picture faded from the children's minds. A little further along we met a witch doctor, with the long body of a bright, green snake wound about his shoulders and waist. This was being carried home to be made into some charm, doubtless. These sights reminded us anew of the great darkness out of which these people are being led, and we thanked God again for the brave struggles of that little company of Christians we had left behind in the lonely Umzumbe Valley.

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